

Alternative Work Schedule Frequently Asked Questions

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What are alternative work schedules?

Alternative work schedules (AWS) allow employees to work non-traditional schedules so they work the same number of hours in fewer days. These alternative work arrangements can be scheduled in various ways. These options reduce traffic congestion as well as the amount of time spent idling in heavy traffic, thereby decreasing fuel consumption and vehicle emissions. Three of the most popular options: 4/40: employees work 10 hours per day, 4 days per week. 9/80: employees work their scheduled 80 hours in 9 days instead of 10. Alternative work schedules have a positive impact on morale, productivity and job satisfaction for the employee and businesses are able to recruit and retain valuable skilled workers by offering such strategies. A flexible work schedule, or flex time, allows employees to stagger their work hours to avoid driving during peak rush-hour traffic.

Is it important to have a written policy on alternative work schedules for my company?

A written policy is essential. It provides the basic information employees need to participate and the available options. Within the written policy, incorporate eligibility requirements, restrictions, monitoring and procedures to participate.

What if all of my staff wants to alternative work schedules with Friday's off. No one will be there on Friday and we need to staff this office every day of the work week. I do not want to get anyone mad at me and I also am not sure how to rate the needs of the requesters to decide who deserves this more and who less. Help.

Decisions for approving flexible work requests should not be based on personal need, but rather on organizational needs. However, if similar proposals are presented, it may be appropriate to consider personal issues to resolve competing needs. Objective criteria, such as seniority, special skills or specific office needs, may serve to resolve these conflicts. Often, a group discussion and team approach helps. Not everyone needs to have the same day off. Another option is to rotate the day off by week or month.

My friend and I work for different departments of the same organization. She was recently changed to an alternative work schedule, working four days instead of five. I brought up the subject with my supervisor about a similar arrangement for myself, but was turned down. Is this fair?

Alternative work schedules are not an across the board benefit for employees. Managers and supervisors know the operations of their unit(s) best and are responsible for final decisions on how to get the work accomplished. Keep in mind that supervisors and managers have the authority to say yes or no to a flexible arrangement, or to postpone consideration of an alternative work schedule program to another time. Since every job, worker and situation are different; it cannot be assumed that the same decision is appropriate for two similar positions.

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How can I work an alternative work schedule if I have trouble keeping up with my workload now?

While some alternative work arrangements may not be feasible for your situation, other flexible work options may work well. For example, your work may be appropriate for a telecommuting or flextime. You would benefit from saved commuting time or an opportunity to focus on a special project. This will not reduce your hours worked, merely where/what time the work is done.

How do alternative work schedules impact hourly employees?

Based on the Federal Labor Standards Act, non-exempt staff should maintain the same number of hours worked weekly during the revised schedule as well as when more traditional hours are worked. Remember, overtime pay is required for non-exempt staff work in excess of normal work week hours up to forty hours a week. Above forty hours a week, time and half pay is required. In a 9/80 program, the pay period is often cut off at noon on Friday to avoid going over 40 hours per week.

How are holidays and paid time off calculated under an alternative work schedule?

Under an alternative work schedule, holiday, sick and vacation time can be confusing. Employees who work 10-hour days and get a day off every week, for example, will get “cheated” if their regularly scheduled day off falls on an official holiday – such as Thanksgiving – that all staff receives anyway. Consider the following methods to avoid inequities in holiday, sick and vacation time:

- Reverting back – Require employees to take the first day before a holiday if it falls on their regularly scheduled day off, and work an additional two hours the day after.
- Credit/Debit – If a holiday falls during the work week, although they would have worked 10 hours, you pay only eight; the balance of two hours is pulled from their vacation or personal holiday bank. Conversely, if the holiday falls on their scheduled day off, eight hours are credited to their holiday/vacation bank.

How do we address management issues when employees are working an alternative work schedule?

- Find solutions to help managers monitor employee attendance. Challenges arise when managers work different schedules than their employees, arriving and leaving at varying times or taking different compressed work week days off.
- Establish core times and core days if inter-departmental or all-company meetings are regular or essential.
- Involve company accountants in developing the policy to expedite accounting for payroll, holiday pay, vacation, overtime, absences, etc. Train managers on policies and procedures.

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